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ABSTRACT

The U.S. lacks a well defined Federal policy for rural education, as those in decision making positions traditionally have represented urban and suburban interests. Much of the blame lies with those of us who are concerned with rural education, for it is our responsibility to see that policy makers are aware of and interested in the unique problems of rural education. Perhaps the greatest problem facing rural education is that of coordinating policies from different factions. For example, when attempting to educate a migrant child, there is need for coordination of educational, agricultural, and migrant worker policies. Likewise, those engaged in the development of rural schools are hampered if they work exclusively on schools and disregard the total rural society. Federal and State Governments must be made to understand that the problems of rural education demands better mechanisms of policy input. Furthermore, it is extremely important that any National policy for rural education should support and, in turn, be supported by policy for total rural development. The U.S. Office of Education's Task Force recommendations of 1969 constitute a viable rural educational policy, but such policy is worthless until implemented; it is essential, therefore, that people at the local level insist via their elected representatives that such policy be implemented. (JC)

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FEDERAL POLICY FOR RURAL EDUCATION

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FEDERAL POLICY FOR RURAL EDUCATION

My first reaction to such a topic as FEDERAL POLICY FOR RURAL EDUCATION was to say there is none; there should be, and then sit down. To say there is none is not completely true, because there is educational policy, and there are other types of policy that have had a bearing on education in rural America. But much of the policy which is meant to have an effect, does not. This is mainly because it has been completely ignored by those people with decision making responsibilities for education in rural areas. In theory, all general educational policy from the Federal level should be directed toward rural, as well as urban and suburban areas. In actual practice, this has not been the case, however, since most people with the power of making policy and decisions concerning education at the Federal level have had a major interest in urban and suburban rather than rural problems. As a result, many of the policies have been directed toward solving those problems in urban and suburban America. There is some hope, however, that we may see some changes taking place. Dr. Virginia Trotter, in an address last October at the Rural Education Association's annual meeting in Portland, indicated that her office would be taking a look at the problems of education in rural America. There are also some indications that our present Commissioner of Education, Dr. Terrel Bell has an interest in solving problems not only in urban, but also in rural America.

Much of the blame, however, lies with those of us concerned with educating the isolated child. We too have the responsibility of seeing that those people with the power to develop policy know of the problems related to rural education. There have been feeble attempts made in the past. For example, the National Federation for the Improvement of Rural Education, commonly known as NFIRE, a few years back set up appointments with people in labor, agriculture, HEW, and

the executive office to discuss the development of policy in rural education. Generally, we were only able to talk to those persons in middle management who had no policy making responsibilities. Such negotiations might have been beneficial, however, if NFIRE had continued to follow up and widen the crack in the door made at that time.

In 1970, Senator Spong from Virginia, called sub committee hearings to get information on education in rural America. I had the opportunity of testifying for that sub committee. It was a real disappointment to see that only one Senator from the entire sub committee (Spong) had interest enough to stay for the entire testimony. One other, Senator Randolph from West Virginia, came in and listened to the testimony of his constituents from West Virginia. But during the day that I was present no other members of the committee were interested enough in education in rural America to even be in attendance. I guess it is for this reason that I question the validity of interest expressed by some of our politicians in the Senate and House today who profess interest in rural America and education in rural America. It is most unfortunate that when a vehicle had been set up there was not even enough interest to command attendance.

Other types of policy which have had a direct effect upon education in rural America have been of such agencies as agriculture, labor, and health. One of the real difficulties in the past has been that such policies have not been coordinated and that each Agency has gone its own separate way. One of the most recent efforts, the Rural Development Act of 1972, attempted to coordinate policy, but in actual practice failed to do so. The majority of funds from this act go to the land grant universities in each state, and the president of that university is responsible for disbursement of funds. In the majority of cases, disbursement has been turned over to the dean of the college of agriculture and the extension and research programs, which

are an inherent part of the college of agriculture. This does not mean that agricultural colleges have not attempted to broaden their horizons, but due to the biases which are inherent in any one discipline, development in rural America has tended to be limited to that of agricultural development. I am not acquainted with any local committees that include the superintendent of schools on the rural development committee. I am not acquainted with any state committees that include their state superintendent of public instruction or one of his designated personnel on their rural development committee. In only one case that I know of is there a professional educator included as a member of the state committee, and this is because of another role he is filling and not because he is a professional educator. I am sure that there are some committees of which I am not aware, where this may not be true, but it is not general practice to involve educators in rural America in the planning of rural development programs.

An area where there has been definite policy for a number of decades for education in rural America, is that of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in its development of educational programs for the Native American. There has been vast criticism recently aimed toward the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and its bureaucratic efforts to bring education to Indian children. Some of this is justified. Such a bureaucracy is very slow to change, but I often look at the history of what the BIA has done and wonder how many states, and how many other agencies would have been willing to develop an educational program for the Indian child at the time of the BIA's inception. It has only been fairly recently that any other governmental organization has been interested enough to provide these services, and even now most states see it as the responsibility of the Federal Government to finance education for the Indian child. The BIA had a very important role to play. This role has changed, and either the bureaucracy must change and meet Indian needs, or some other agency should

take over the responsibility of educating the Native American. The real responsibility for developing educational policy for any group is that of the state, and this should always be kept in mind when discussing educational policy in rural America.

Need for Federal Policies

It is evident that there is a need at the Federal level to recognize the unique problems involved in educating the rural child. This has been pointed out by a number of people. In the testimonies at the sub committee hearing, which I mentioned earlier, most participants indicated there was need for some coordinating effort. In other committee hearings in 1974 (i.e., The Sub Committee on Agriculture and Labor of the Committee on Education and Labor of the House of Representatives),(1) Dr. Gloria Mattera (Director of New York State Migrant Center, State University College of Arts and Sciences at Geneseo, New York) strongly indicated that educational policy should be coordinated with that of agriculture and that of the migrant worker--that these should not be separate policies, and that needs of the migrant child cannot be adequately met if each agency operates independently without coordinating their efforts.

Ed Moe and Lew Tamblyn(2) in the document entitled Rural Schools as a Mechanism for Rural Development recognized this when they stated,

> Basic questions of the functions of schools, of their goals, of the roles they were to take, of what they were to teach, of size and scale, of costs, and of support had to be rethought. Those engaged in development of rural schools became convinced that one can not fundamentally improve rural schools by working exclusively on the school. Rural communities, rural society, the support agencies for education, and in fact, the total society had to be taken into account.

Thompson and Marshall(3) in their very recent report, January 1975, on stages of industrial development and poverty impact upon labor markets of the south, also indicated that it was extremely important, when reflecting upon

policy, that adequate and competent job training and basic educational programs for the locally unskilled and under-educated be a part of any industrial development program in the rural areas of the south.

J. L. Somers[4] in his essay on the Public Employment Program in rural areas (published by Michigan State University, Department of Agriculture-Economics) indicated that he was convinced that the Emergency Employment Act could not by itself adequately attack manpower problems in rural areas, and that public employment programs must be integrated with manpower, educational, and regional development policies. People in many areas are beginning to realize that education in rural America is not an island unto itself--that total societal needs must be considered in terms of policy and that education is but one of these societal needs.

This approach is being recognized by other countries as well. Two years ago, I had the opportunity to attend an international meeting on problems of arid lands, sponsored by the American Association of Advancement of Science, which was held in Mexico City. The majority of speakers there indicated that development must be a total community program and that education must be included if rural development is to be successful. Such policy coordination should also be implemented in larger regional areas instead of just at the local school level. In a recent conversation with a Regional Inspector of schools from Australia, a man responsible for approximately 30 isolated schools, the importance of regional planning rather than isolated planning was clearly stressed.

Suggestions and Directions for Federal Policy related to Education in Rural Areas.

It is extremely important that the Federal Government as well as State Governments recognize that there are unique problems of education in rural and isolated areas, due to the fact that they are rural and they are isolated.

Policy must be developed which will be specifically geared to help the people in these areas meet their educational needs. Too often, policy has been aimed at broad, general areas and has been predominantly based on input from urban and suburban America. There need to be better mechanisms for policy input at Federal and State levels for those persons involved in education in rural America. Such Federal policy should also recognize the fact that primary responsibility for education rests with the state and should strongly encourage State Departments of Education to strengthen their educational programs for isolated and rural students. It is extremely important that any National policy for rural education should support and in turn be supported by stronger policy for rural development. Such a suggestion/recommendation was made by Moe and Tamblyn. They also recommended that upon issue of any policy statement, steps should be taken to implement the recommendations of the United States Office of Education's Task Force report on rural education which was submitted in 1969. The primary recommendations of the Task Force are to:

1. Establish a rural unit in the United States Office of Education.
2. Develop and adequately fund a National Center for rural education.
3. Establish one or more model rural schools.
4. Induce the several States to take appropriate action re: rural education.
5. Provide incentive funds to teachers in rural areas.
6. Provide incentive funds for shared services.
7. Provide funds to support interstate councils or commissions.
8. The functions of the rural unit would be:
    a. To collect and disseminate information pertaining to developments in health, education and welfare relevant to rural needs; to publicize models which have been successful in providing services in rural populations; and to provide information regarding federally supported programs.

b. To further the coordination of State, regional and Federal programs which serve rural areas.

c. To initiate the "packaging" of programs for rural communities, drawing upon funds from various sources.

d. To provide technical assistance to rural communities in the development and improvement of programs in health, education and welfare through a corps of specialists serving as consultants to State and local as well as to regional agencies in rural areas.

e. To represent rural interest within and outside the Department.

f. To stimulate land-grant and other rural institutions of higher education to conduct long-range research and development activities dealing with rural problems and to provide appropriate extension education to rural communities.

It is interesting to note, that though the Task Force was established and did develop a report, there is no indication that the Office of Education has ever acted upon that report. People in rural America interested in education should strongly insist via their elected representatives that the recommendations of the Task Force of 1969 be reviewed and appropriately implemented. Policy is useless unless it is implemented, and it is not implemented unless the people at the local level desire that it be so. Meetings such as this can serve as an incentive only if the recommendations are implemented and changes take place. It will be worthless, however, if we do nothing after we leave Washington. I would like to see such meetings as this held in every state in the nation and in every county in the United States where there are rural children.

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